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ABSTRACT

The need for staff development as a means of facilitating professional and personal growth is explored. A model for staff development which is relevant and effective for student personnel services is presented. The characteristics and processes of a viable growth model are identified and discussed. (Author)

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A STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR STUDENT PERSONNEL SERVICES

by

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A STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR STUDENT PERSONNEL SERVICESINTRODUCTION

Community and junior college personnel have been concerned for some time about the paucity of viable staff development programs at most institutions. Many authorities and organizations have been advocating a commitment of temporal and fiscal resources to support staff development programs of high quality. The ubiquity of the interest in such programs is evident in Garrison's (1968, p. 23) contention that the need for regular professional "refreshment has been identified by thousands of junior college instructors as their number one priority." Similarly, Gleazer (1968, p. 120) emphasized that "striking in its common expression is the concern for staying abreast of developments in one's discipline and refreshing and upgrading oneself professionally." Although these statements imply a concern with the professional development of teaching personnel, there has been equal or perhaps greater interest for the professional development of student personnel practitioners.

A summary statement by T.R. McConnel (Junior College Student Personnel Programs: Appraisal and Development, 1965, FOREWARD) of the National Committee for the Appraisal and Development of Junior College Student Personnel Programs triggered intense interest in staff development ever since it first appeared in print; he said, "...when measured against criteria of scope and effectiveness, student personnel programs in community colleges are woefully inadequate."

The National Committee also submitted numerous suggestions which it regarded as constructive recommendations for upgrading student personnel services. Collins (1967) has recorded a variety of approaches to staff development which were among the recommendations of the Committee.

The unanimity of interest in professional development among student personnel workers also is reflected in the guidelines which have been adopted by various professional groups, particularly counselors. For example, in guidelines developed by the University and College Center Directors Task Force (Kirk, Johnson, Redfield, Free, Michael, and Roston, 1971) the following recommendations can be found: 1) staff time should be systematically set aside to be spent on professional development activities: 2) a continuous in-service training program should be maintained: 3) staff members should have the opportunity to attend professional meetings off campus. A very similar set of recommendations were proffered in the Guidelines for Community and Junior College Counseling Services (1972).

Community college authorities such as Matson and Harvey also have stressed the importance of staff development. Matson (1967, p. 178) feels such programs are needed if student personnel workers are to make significant contributions to the objectives of their respective institutions; her opinion is stated succinctly:

... efforts must be directed to the identification of experience and training which is likely to provide a supply of professionals prepared to assume this role in all its dimensions. This will involve not only atten-

tion to appropriate pre-service preparation but a major emphasis on providing ongoing staff development which will enable the student personnel professionals to maintain and enhance their knowledge and competencies.

Chief student personnel officers have been charged by Harvey (1968) with making opportunities for professional development possible for their staffs. Accordingly, Harvey suggests staff development must be among the salient objectives of any student personnel administrator.

Notwithstanding encouragement of the kind alluded to above, evidence suggests such goals generally have not been realized. A recent study reported (Thurston, Zook, Neher, Ingraham, 1972):

Staff in-service training is an important but widely neglected function of chief personnel administrators. This problem could be helped by the development of possible models...

While many CSPAs undoubtedly recognize the need for systematic staff development, as well as for their own personal and professional growth, they lack the resources for total staff upgrading.

Either there has been too little commitment and effort in the desired direction, or the steps taken have lacked the boldness and the imagination which may be required if such programs are to succeed. Apparently, what is needed are "models" of staff development programs which can be tried and tested.

The following model is presented because it represents to the staff of the Lehigh County Community College a model which, after having been attempted and compared to others, is both viable and unique. The model is effective because it contains several elements which, when combined and integrated, are vital to staff development programs, especially if the programs are designed to be dynamic and growth producing. Most of the elements are crucial whether the professional development is for the entire student personnel staff or one of its specialist groups. Furthermore, the model can be generalized to be relevant and effective for the development of faculty or other groups of professional educators as well.

THE MODEL

The goals for staff development at the Lehigh County Community College are:

1. To continually provide the atmosphere and content for the improvement and acquisition of professional skills and for personal growth.
2. To utilize the team approach in the management of particular cases.
3. To provide a specific time for the exchange of ideas and problem solving in reference to the programming, operation and maintenance of the various services.
4. To provide a specific time for announcements and discussions of administrative matters.

As can be seen from the goals, the focus of the program is almost exclusively on professional and personal development. When staff development becomes synonymous with administrative detail, as is often the case, tardiness, disinterest and frustration are evident. Consequently, the preponderance of time in staff meetings is spent trying to realize the first three of the above goals. Administrative announcements are placed at the end of the meeting rather than the beginning.

In addition to having explicit goals, another important aspect of the program is that one person on the staff has been designated as responsible for planning, conducting and evaluating the programs. The coordinator accepts recommendations from staff members, and he consults frequently with the staff regarding their

training needs. This feature of the program is crucial because, by having one person administer the program, it assures continuity and quality of programs for staff development meetings. Of course, while the scheduling of events is assigned to one individual, all staff members contribute in one way or another to the planning and to the actual programs. If interest is to be sustained total participation in planning is important. When only one person decides what the content will be, as too frequently is the case, interest often wanes.

Another outstanding feature of the program results from a cooperative internship agreement that the Lehigh County Community College has entered into with two local graduate institutions. The internship program is an integral part of the in-service training of the regular professional staff. Many hours are spent critiquing their performances and exploring the interns' attitudes about their profession, the students, and the community college. Student personnel services aspirants are included in the staff development activities because we believe by participating they will grow professionally and will come to recognize the importance of constant training and continuous striving for improvement. The staff of the college also benefits by staying abreast of the trends and content prevalent in graduate training programs.

At the Lehigh County Community College, a meaningful component of time has been committed, on a systematic basis, to the staff development program. Each staff member spends the equivalent of one-half working day a week in professional growth activities and

the supervision of interns. It is regarded as essential that the staff development meetings be scheduled once a week among the regular ongoing activities of the staff; this may be one of the most salient features of the model, simply because it communicates to the staff that professional development is an important ongoing activity. Unfortunately, at many institutions such activities are scheduled only once or twice a year. Certainly, such an approach is not adequate.

Financial resources also have been committed by the college to this important enterprise. Money has been set aside for the rental and/or purchase of training media and equipment. Additionally, travel allowances are provided to have staff members attend colloquia and seminars as well as local regional, and national professional conferences. All of the off-campus activities meet the criteria of satisfying both the needs of the individual and the student personnel are required to report, either briefly or at length, on such visitations off campus. They are asked to especially address themselves to new issues, ideas, techniques, etc. which we might be exploring.

Facilities also reflect the support given to these activities, i.e., facilities have been provided to house all of the activities and materials associated with staff development. Lastly, the student personnel division has a staff room complete with a comprehensive professional library. While fiscal support is important, it should be noted that high quality programs can be sustained without investing large sums of money. We have discovered that the resourcefulness of the staff and volunteer services of community and state agencies have enabled us to keep the costs very low.

THE PROCESS

It is the belief of the Lehigh County Community Staff that a growth oriented staff development model rests squarely on the overall attitudes and behaviors exhibited by each individual on the staff.* Behavioral scientists have been actively engaged identifying certain conditions which appear to be necessary for effective group processes and for significant interpersonal relationships to occur. Conditions such as acceptance, trust, respect, and understanding have been found to be integral elements in such effective relationships. These elements form the underpinnings of any staff development experience. It has been our experience that by adopting and maintaining the conditions of acceptance, trust, respect, and understanding, certain behaviors take place which would otherwise not occur. Staff members have learned to deal with one another in open honest communication; genuine feedback is provided to one another; and support can be relied upon in the face of adversity. The staff is encouraged to take risks in self-growth, self-exploration, trying the new and different, and evaluating the present.

Both personal and professional growth are the ultimate goals of the staff development experience. Both goals are realized only when the focal point in such an experience is the individual. Too often an arbitrary and artificial separation is made in regard to the development and growth of the person and the growth of the professions. Professional development in the form of skill and tech-

nique acquisition, conference attendance, research, and journal reading is considered appropriate. However, when one begins a dialogue related to one's values, attitudes, difficulties and satisfaction in personal relations, marital problems, feelings about sexuality, etc., often these are not considered appropriate topics for staff development. The underlying attitude accepted by the staff at the Lehigh County Community College is that an individual member is first a person and then a professional. While some delineation between the two may be appropriate for analysis, the fact is that a real separation does not exist. When we talk with one another as people who have concerns, difficulties, needs and emotions, then and only then do we begin a positive dialogue in relation to our professional selves. We have found that when personal growth is facilitated within the staff, professional development becomes easier to attain.

Honest inquiry to ascertain the truth is at the very foundation of the growth process. Hence, a research attitude enhances the process, because, whether engaged in professional growth, planning an educational program, staffing a client, or discussing our delivery system, four questions have guided our activities: 1) where are we presently? 2) where do we want to go? 3) how can we attain the goal? 4) how will we know when we have attained the goal?

Where are we presently? An assessment of where the staff is individually and collectively is probably the most crucial step in our process of growth and development. Working towards answers, even if only partial or tentative, can be accomplished best in the

supportive atmosphere alluded to above. To seek the truth, self-awareness is heightened and rather difficult questions are posed. The process is difficult because each person becomes aware of himself or herself, and they admit to areas of misinformation or no information, feelings of inadequacy and fears that one is not being as effective as one would like. People take the risk of disclosing such sensitive data to themselves and their colleagues; this can only be accomplished when a staff is committed to a helping relationship among themselves.

Where do we want to go? The practicality of defining goals and objectives for the group is usually accomplished after much input. One staff member may want to learn more about desensitization, another wants consultation about the design of a research project, and still another expresses an interest in a new educational program of delivery system. All of the staff interests are part of the goal setting or planning phase. Priorities are determined by relating staff needs and interests to those of the college. Once the priorities are established, specific objectives or goals are articulated.

Two points are important to note. First, the staff as a whole accepts the responsibility for their decisions. Second, it is important to state specific objectives and goals, because we have discovered that ambiguity is counterproductive. The setting of group objectives does not preclude setting individual objectives. Thus, while the staff as a whole is working on one phase of staff development, an individual staff member may direct his or her attention toward another topic. In this manner the work of the one

member often becomes the topic for the entire staff at a later date.

How can we attain the goal? Initially, the process of pursuing specific goals takes place in a weekly three hour staff meeting, at which time problem-solving and decision making activities predominate. However, the formal meeting is seen only as one vehicle for accomplishing objectives. The meeting is the focus of the activities, but we have observed that individual contacts throughout the week, on a daily basis, provide the carry-over necessary for full staff development. In other words, we have learned that the professional growth process alluded to above becomes a dynamic one which occurs daily, often without formal structure; the enthusiasm over the quest for personal and professional substance is sustained over a long period of time, with individuals often pursuing it on their own. Additionally, we have observed that attitudes are fostered to the point where staff members strive incessantly to improve, and evaluation becomes a welcomed part of the process.

How will we know when we have attained the goal? The question of evaluation is one to which the staff constantly addresses itself. Evaluation of what is happening and how it's happening does not produce fear and resistance. The philosophy is that it is alright to make mistakes; we can learn by mistakes; we can improve only if we are willing to face the possibility that what we are doing is not working. With this in mind the staff work towards providing feedback for one another, believing only constant evaluation and feedback can lead to growth. Change and flexibility are a significant objective of the process of staff development. Staff and individual

evaluation are planned activities, with meetings regularly scheduled to specifically focus on assessing our effectiveness as individuals as well as a team. These are not necessarily pleasant meetings but they usually are growth producing.

The importance of maintaining the conditions under which people are encouraged to be themselves is not an easy matter. It is our observation that too often the failure of staff development is predicated on the false assumption that once conditions of trust, acceptance, respect, and understanding are established, open communication will flourish. We have found that the establishment of these conditions is a process of constant work and discovery. It is not enough to say we will be open with another. Once the idea is accepted, it requires effort to establish how one is open, and to practice openness. The process requires attention and further awareness. And, ultimately, the process of staff development is at its best when the process is an ongoing day by day dynamic experience.

SUMMARY

Recently, O'Banion, Thurston and Gulden (1972, p. 203) provided a list of desirable outcomes which should result from valid student personnel practices and interventions, if they are predicated upon a student development model; the list included the following: skill competencies; flexibility and creativity; awareness of self and others; acceptance of self and others; courage to explore and experiment; openness to experience; and the ability to respond positively to change. If educators aspire to produce such traits in students, it follows logically that we must provide a variety of experiences which will induce the same behaviors in the staff members who have been given the primary responsibility for bringing about changes in students. Shaffer (1967, p. 182) has supported such a contention:

The student personnel staff faces current challenges by recognizing that continuous professional growth and development by every staff member is an essential aspect of effective student personnel work. A person cannot help other people grow if he himself has stopped growing. Individual staff members have this personal obligation. More importantly for staff leaders a major responsibility is leading, stimulating, and facilitating the personal and professional growth of colleagues. A staff climate encouraging such an attitude does not just happen, it must be planned and developed.

The model presented herein is one that emerged at the Lehigh County Community College as a result of many long and arduous hours

of planning, trying, evaluating, and trying again. It is not a panacea but it has proved helpful, satisfying and provocative to those people who have been associated with it. Perhaps it will help others in their planning or will at least stimulate others to begin formulating a staff development program of their own.

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